



Case reference: **VAR2654**

Admission Authority: **Milton Keynes City Council for Howe Park School**

Date of decision: **7 January 2026**

Determination

In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Milton Keynes City Council for Howe Park School, for 2026/27.

I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 30.

The referral

1. Milton Keynes City Council (the Local Authority, LA) has referred to the adjudicator a proposal for a variation to the admission arrangements for Howe Park School (the School) for admission in 2026/27 (the arrangements).
2. The School is a community infant school for children aged four to seven years in Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. It is a co-educational non-selective school.
3. The School was judged to be good by Ofsted at its last inspection in October 2023.
4. Parties to the request are;
 - a. The Governing Body of the School
 - b. The Local Authority (LA).
5. The proposed variation is to reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN) from 60 places to 30 for admission to Reception for 2026/27.

Jurisdiction and procedure

6. Section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (the Act) makes provision for variations to determined arrangements. Paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7 of the School Admissions Code (the Code) say (insofar as is relevant here):

“3.6 Once admission arrangements have been determined for a particular school year, they cannot be revised by the admission authority unless such revision is necessary to give effect to a mandatory requirement of this Code, admissions law, a determination of the Adjudicator or any misprint in the admission arrangements. Admission authorities may propose other variations where they consider such changes to be necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals **must** be referred to the Schools Adjudicator for approval, and the appropriate bodies notified. Where the local authority is the admission authority for a community or voluntary controlled school, it **must** consult the governing body of the school before making any reference.

3.7 Admission authorities **must** notify the appropriate bodies of all variations.”

7. The arrangements were determined by the Local Authority on 11 February 2025.

8. The Local Authority has provided me with confirmation that the appropriate bodies have been notified of the proposed variation in line with the Code. The Body has provided me with confirmation that they have been consulted about the proposed variation.

9. I am satisfied that the appropriate procedures were followed, and that the proposed variation is within my jurisdiction.

10. In considering the variation request, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the Code. The information I have considered in reaching my decision includes:

- the referral from the LA dated 18 November 2025 and supporting documents;
- the determined Arrangements for 2026/27 and the proposed variation to those Arrangements;
- responses from the LA and the School to my requests for further information;
- maps, including Google Maps and those showing the location of the School; and
- information available on government websites including:
 - a. Get Information About Schools (GIAS)

- b. Find and compare schools and colleges in England (the DFE website)
- c. Financial Benchmarking and Insights Tool (FBIT)
- d. School and LA websites.

11. In the interest of dealing speedily with this and other requests for variations for schools, I have not considered other aspects of the arrangements. Therefore, nothing in this determination should be taken as indicating that other aspects of the arrangements do or do not conform with the requirements relating to admissions.

Consideration of proposed variation

- 12. There is no formal consultation required for a variation and so parents and others do not have the opportunity to express their views. Clearly it is desirable that changes to arrangements are made via the process of determination following consultation as the consultation process allows those with an interest to express their views. It also allows for objections to the adjudicator. None of this is afforded by the variation process.
- 13. I note here that the arrangements for 2027/28 have not yet been determined. This means that if I decide to vary the arrangements for 2026/27 approving the proposed PAN reduction it will have the effect of forming the 'baseline' for subsequent years.
- 14. Should I determine to approve the proposed PAN reduction, then there will be no need to consult on a reduction to the PAN in 2027/28 as this would be carried forward from the amended 2026/27 arrangements. However, for the avoidance of doubt, there is nothing in the statutory scheme that would prevent the Local Authority from consulting if it wished to do so; it is simply that it would not be required to. The Local Authority has informed me that the consultation is already underway to reduce the PAN of the School in 2027 to 30 pupils.
- 15. Paragraph 3.6 of the Code (as above) requires that admission arrangements, once determined, may only be revised, that is changed or varied, if there is a major change of circumstance or certain other limited and specified circumstances. I will consider below whether the proposed variation is justified by the change in circumstances.
- 16. The Local Authority has proposed that the PAN for Reception in the School is reduced from 60 to 30. The School has historically been a two-form entry infant school. A fall in birth rate and consequent reduction in demand for pupil places in the planning area means that the number of pupils admitted to the School has reduced from 60 to 33 in September 2025.

17. The major change of circumstances relied upon by the Local Authority is set out in the referral as follows:

“Milton Keynes, like many other local authority areas, is experiencing significant surplus places due to a fall in the birth rate.”

“Howe Park has been a 2FE (form of entry) infant school with a published admission number (PAN) of 60. As a result of a fall in demand, the LA, as the admission authority, is currently consulting on admission arrangements for 2027 and is proposing a reduction in PAN from 60 to 30. The fall in pupil numbers is having a significant impact on the budget position and is not sustainable in the longer term. For September 2025, only 33 pupils were admitted to Year R leaving 27 vacancies in the year group. This is a significant challenge for the school as, due to Infant Class Size legislation, the school is operating with two classes but without sufficient funding to appropriately fund two classes.”

18. The Local Authority states that:

“A PAN reduction will enable the School to implement a staffing restructure, reducing the projected deficit. The financial position of the School is not sustainable in the longer term without the PAN reduction. The School is working closely with the LA to explore further organisational changes needed to ensure long term sustainability, but transition to a 1 FE infant school model is one of the key actions identified as immediately required.”

19. The Governing Body state that:

“The Governing Body believes that the proposed variation is both necessary and in the best interests of current and future pupils. The change aligns with the school’s strategic planning, ensures the effective use of resources, and supports the continued delivery of high-quality education.

If the variation is not agreed, the following difficulties might be seen. Maintaining a higher PAN could force inefficient or unbalanced class structures. Financial planning will remain challenging if the school must operate with surplus places this would continue to create financial pressures, limiting the school’s ability to invest in teaching, staff, learning resources and targeted interventions.”

20. In support of the variation request and illustrating the financial challenge faced by the School, the Admission Authority provided the financial information in Table 1 for the School:

Table 1. Financial position of the School based on current structures if the PAN reduction is or is not approved.

Revenue Budget	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Without PAN reduction and staff changes	£32,000 surplus	£269,000 deficit	£689,000 deficit
With PAN reduction	£32,000 surplus	£257,000 deficit	£378,000 deficit

21. The FBIT website confirms that in 2024 the School had an in-year deficit of £19,000 and revenue reserve of £140,000, with areas including cost of teaching and teaching support staff as priority areas for cost reductions.
22. It is clear from the information available that the School needs to reduce costs to secure a sustainable future.
23. The LA has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for the children in its area. To fulfil this duty the LA assesses the future number of places likely to be needed and plans to meet that need. The LA uses planning areas, which are geographical areas and the schools within those areas, for this purpose.
24. The School lies within the Shenley Brook End planning area. The demand for reception places in the planning area is illustrated in table 2.

Table 2: Pupil number projections for Shenley Brook End planning area.

	2026	2027	2028
Number of places available (sum of PANs)	240	240	240
Total number of places required for reception.	140	134	126
Balance of places.	100	106	114

25. The reduction in PAN requested would reduce the number of available places in the planning area from 240 to 210. The LA informed me that it is also seeking to reduce the PAN for Long Meadow School in the planning area from 60 to 45. The combined reduction would mean a reduction of 45 places in the planning area. This would still leave a surplus of more than 50 places or around 25 per cent. The LA have demonstrated that there are adequate places within the planning area to ensure parents can access appropriate provision in Reception.

26. Data provided by the LA indicates that preferences for the School are projected to be close to or slightly higher than 30 but lower than 60 for the next five years with a maximum of 43 in 2027. This would still leave the School with 17 vacant places and be required to run two small reception classes, placing a financial burden on the School that would limit what they can provide for existing children. There remains a high number of surplus places available within the planning area ensuring the LA meets its statutory duty to provide sufficient places.
27. I have tried to ensure that I have considered the competing needs of providing the school places that parents want for their children and the financial viability of the School.
28. I accept that the LA has provided compelling evidence that it will be able to manage school places in the planning area by reducing the PAN at Howe Park School for 2026/27 and support the financial position of the School.
29. I, therefore, approve the proposed PAN reduction for 2026/27 which will enable the PAN to be reduced from 60 to 30 pupil places in Reception.

Determination

30. In accordance with section 88E of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, I approve the proposed variation to the admission arrangements determined by Milton Keynes Local Authority for Howe Park School, for 2026/27.
31. I determine that for admission in 2026/27 the published admission number will be 30.

Dated: 7 January 2026

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Philip Lloyd